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ABSTRACT

This report presents an examination of the use of a participative model in the strategic planning process at a publicly-supported, comprehensive institution in the middle Atlantic region of the United States. Specific attention is given to the process of developing the vision statement, an undertaking of approximately 15 months preceding Board of Trustee approval. This particular institution had undergone dramatic and unsettling strategic planning activity and change four years earlier that resulted in improved financial status and program development. Because of this past experience, this new strategic planning initiative for the 21st century was met with great skepticism by faculty. A survey was sent to 264 faculty members during the development of this new vision statement to determine their participation in its development; 86 responded, of which only 13 percent were unfamiliar with the approach taken. Most found the vision statement beneficial for the future of the institution. Many were skeptical regarding the extent to which the vision and its individual elements were realistic, although nearly half thought that it reflected the institution's values in a considerable fashion. Statistical analysis indicated that the number of involvements that the faculty member had in the development of the statement was positively associated with the extent to which the faculty member thought that the process was appropriate. Overall, faculty participation in the developmental process was found to be an important contributor to its motivating capacity and acceptance. (Contains 12 references.) (NAV)

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Faculty Perceptions of Strategic Visioning

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(Prepared for presentation at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, April, 1996)

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Background

Strategic planning has been an important tool on the higher education scene since George Keller's *Academic Strategy* (1983) made the compelling case for colleges and universities to adopt new procedures, structures, and attitudes to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment and a future that was growing cloudier by the day. Keller decried the absence of leadership on most campuses and argued that presidents needed to begin to shift the focus of their attention and energy away from day-to-day problems and academic year planning horizons toward "the long-term interests of their institutions and their increasingly competitive and difficult environments (p. 165)." While the strategic planning process should yield a succinctly stated set of operational aims that will guide institutional decision-making, Keller suggested that fundamental to the success of the effort was the ability "to get all the key people thinking innovatively and acting strategically, with the future in mind (p. 140)."

Thus, the explicit goal of strategic planning should be the achievement of a desirable future. Of course, this requires imagining a realistic, credible, attractive future -- or *vision* -- for the institution. As noted by Kotter (1995: 63), "without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the

organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all." Selecting the right vision, then, is the key strategic decision that will guide the rest of the strategy. Burt Nanus (1992) posits that the right vision must not only be appropriate for the times, but must also be appropriate for the institution, reflecting its uniqueness, its strengths, and its aspirations. Such a vision hold the promise of attracting commitment and energizing people, of creating meaning in the lives of the members of the college community, of establishing a standard of excellence, and of bridging the present and the future. Indeed, Burnside (1992) chronicled the Center for Creative Leadership's work with one organization whose vision statement resulted in previously cynical and mistrustful employees spontaneously volunteering for *vision action teams* to help achieve the vision.

Keller (1983: 141) cautions that, while the president and the board of trustees have final authority, the vision cannot be their personal construct "to the exclusion of considerations of other realities." These realities include the societal and technological trends that affect the institution, the evolving nature of the higher education enterprise, the changing views of the public regarding the value that the institution provides society, institutional strengths and weaknesses, etc. Further, the ability to come to grips with these factors requires the involvement of the major stakeholders (Nanus, 1992). The faculty is among the most central of stakeholder groups to an institution of higher education. It is difficult to imagine the success of a strategic planning process that does not accord them a significant role. In fact, Miller and Seagren (1993: 113), while acknowledging that "little definitive research exists on the true impact of faculty participation in governance activities" (among which the visioning and strategic planning processes must certainly be included), observe that a pattern of faculty involvement often

provides "a very real sense of ownership and mutual concern among administrators and faculty for the direction and future of the institution," but that lack of participation results in division and demoralization. Accordingly, Meredith's (1993) survey of planners at 133 colleges and universities found all agreeing that participatory processes made campus planning work; over three-fifths thought the involvement of the academic community to be crucial to success.

In many instances, however, involvement may be more shadow than substance. Dolence and Norris (1995: 86), for example, assert that "too often key constituents are insulated from the harsh political and economic realities [although] their compliance and conformance with strategies for the future [is expected]." Several factors may result in a presidential conclusion to establish a *pro forma* process that will provide the appearance of participation, but that really has a predetermined outcome. Among them are the state-maintaining nature of campus politics where turf protection is foremost, and the existence of a major gulf between the faculty and the president with neither trusting the other (Larson, Milton, and Schmidlein, 1988; Miller and Seagren, 1993). The president may get the plan that s/he wants, but the institution may not move forward.

Indeed, Larson, Milton, and Schmidlein (1988: 1) point out that many campus planning ventures "have been frustrating and disappointing....[due] to a lack of fit between the assumptions underlying recommended planning approaches and the operational realities of academic institutions." Donnithorne (1991-92) has concluded that it is not campus politics that bogs the institutions down, but the value-laden and qualitative nature of goal determination

involved in visioning and strategic planning that causes a disparity of opinion that must be resolved. He argues that the long run success of institutional planning is dependant upon the political skill of campus leaders. Michelson, McGee, and Hawley (1994: 7) hold that no strategic leader can be successful if s/he is unable to build consensus for action by ensuring "that structure..., norms, and processes are in place to produce high quality policy results." Dolence and Norris (1995: 88) would operationalize this through presidents "shaping the debate and helping the campus build a new set of shared values" regarding the future. But while true consensus may be highly desirable, it may prove impossible to achieve -- even among the senior executives (Bryson, 1988; Kotter, 1995). Nevertheless, without a powerful coalition behind a strategic renewal effort, it is bound to fail . Recognizing this gap between the ideal and the real, Bolman and Deal (1994: 83) would argue that college presidents must exercise political leadership that will coalesce key players and groups; that is, "rather than viewing conflict as splintering or disintegrating, [presidents must] see it as a positive means of moving toward cohesion and integration" by creating supportive coalitions.

Strategic Visioning at "Midlantic University"

Our study examines an effort to use a participative model in the strategic planning process at a publicly supported comprehensive institution in the middle Atlantic region that we are calling "Midlantic University." More specifically, we focused on the process of developing the vision statement, an undertaking of approximately 15 months preceding board of trustee approval. Four years earlier during a time of severe economic recession, the institution had undergone a rancorous strategic planning activity that was intended to reposition the institution

to meet the challenges of the decade of the 1990s. The strategic planning committee, which was broadly representative of the college community, had taken their task seriously in recommending the closure of several academic degree programs. True to what one would expect on most campuses, these recommendations proved divisive. The campus noise heightened at the end of the process when the president added to the plan several new (and expensive) programs that many felt changed the very nature, if not the mission, of the institution. Subsequent to the adoption of the plan for the 1990s, the university's financial picture improved substantially and major progress was attained in the development of the controversial programs.

When it came time to develop the strategic plan for the early twenty-first century, faculty who had been involved in the previous process greeted the president's call for community participation with great skepticism, citing what they believed to have been his having put them through the pain of cutting while leaving for himself the pleasure of creative growth. Thus, rather than jumping directly into planning, the president sought to develop a future vision toward which a plan would be developed. This, too, was greeted with skepticism, as most on campus were convinced that the president was only going through the motions after which he would advance his own vision to the trustees for approval. However, in the fall of 1993, a series of long-range planning forums was initiated, and seventeen meetings were held between December and July, offering the opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and trustees to provide their views on what the university should look like going into the next century and how it should get there. The forums included open sessions and invitational meetings. At each, a specific set of pre-circulated and targeted questions was discussed. Thus, for example some sessions focused on

new academic programs, others on the ideal size and nature of the student body, others on financing the vision, etc. During the summer and early fall, a draft of the vision statement was prepared using the minutes of the long-planning forums as the basis. Three successive drafts of the vision paper were circulated for comment between October 1994 and January 1995. With each circulation came the opportunity for written feedback, as well as discussions at regularly scheduled meetings including department meetings, the College Senate, the Student Government Association, trustee committees, etc. Revisions were made to accommodate concerns raised during each comment period. After the third circulation, few comments of a negative nature were received, and in February the board affirmatively acted on the president's recommendation that the revised vision statement be approved.

The vision statement, which fixed on a horizon of about 15 years, included an environmental scan that addressed population growth and demographic change, advancing technology, geo-political transformation and the increasingly global economy, taxpayer unrest, and cultural fragmentation. It suggested that Midlantic should evolve as a community of learners with a curriculum that integrates professional and liberal education. Developing intellect, shaping values and molding character, and enhancing the capacity of students for a personally fulfilling and socially responsible life were hallmarks of the university's vision statement. Its seven major goals included:

- transforming the campus culture to one characterized by immersion in a comprehensive educational program designed to prepare the whole student for an integrated life in a continuously changing, rapidly advancing, and ever-shrinking world;

- removing the artificial walls that traditionally stand between what students learn in class and out of class (including a redefinition of teaching load requirements to promote out-of-class interaction between students and faculty;
- bringing technological awareness and competency to all students so that they may reap the rewards of the information age and be able to function at a high level in this new world;
- fostering among students an on-going commitment to the improvement of their society and the wider world;
- promoting the ability of students to function effectively in an increasingly diverse America and an ever-shrinking world;
- initiating new degree programs, particularly at the graduate level, in response to societal changes, and progressing toward a Carnegie Classification as a Doctoral University II and then as a Doctoral University I;
- growing the enrollment by approximately 40 percent, with the undergraduate student mix being reconfigured to include more traditional-age, full-time undergraduates interested in immersing themselves in the educational process.

While the strategic planning process would await the arrival of the university's new provost that summer, the acting provost kept the momentum going by convening a small group of staff and faculty to develop a planning framework to be implemented under the new provost. In the fall, a broadly representative College Planning Committee was appointed by the president and charged to prepare by the following spring a plan to put the first five years of progress

toward the vision in motion. As its first order of business, the committee decided to redraft the college's ponderous mission statement into a succinct paragraph that captured the institutional essence. Within weeks, three potential mission statements were circulated on the campus, written feedback was received that resulted in a new single draft. Discussion was held at two open hearings, prior to approval in December 1995 by the trustees.

At the same time that it was rewriting the mission statement, the committee decided to divide into task forces, each focused on one of the seven goals of the vision statement. An invitation to participate was sent to the campus community , resulting in more than 130 volunteers. All were placed on a task force in accordance with the priorities that each had listed. At this writing, each of the task forces has finished its work, and their reports are before the committee.

From all outward appearances, the strategy that the president had followed overcame the negativity associated with the previous strategic planning process. Broad involvement and robust discussion accompanied the development of the vision statement, which apparently has led to substantial agreement regarding the university's future and a willingness among large numbers of the Midlantic community to help make the vision possible. However, since appearances can be deceiving, we sought to determine the perceptions of the Midlantic faculty regarding the process and content of the vision statement.

Presentation of the Data

A survey was sent to the 264 faculty members who were continuously employed between fall 1993 when the process of developing the vision statement was initiated and fall 1995 when the strategic planning process was initiated. Responses were received from 86 faculty (33%). The response rate was highest among faculty from the School of Education (48%) and the School of Business (45%). However, only 26% of the Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty and 24% of the Fine Arts faculty replied. The distribution of respondents by school is displayed in Table 1. Approximately a quarter of the sample were full professors, more than a third were associate professors, and 40% were assistant professors; one respondent was an instructor. Approximately 55% of the respondents had served the university for more than 20 years; about a third had served 10 or fewer years.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of the Sample

School		Rank		Years of Service	
Arts and Sciences	44.2%	Professor	24.4%	25+	25.6%
Business	11.6%	Associate	33.7%	21-25	29.1%
Education	33.7%	Assistant	39.5%	16-20	3.5%
Fine & Performing		Instructor	1.2%	11-15	9.4%
Arts	10.5%	N/R	1.2%	6-10	14.0%
				1-5	17.4%
				N/R	1.2%
Total	100%		100%		100%

Regarding the process of the vision's development, only 13% of the respondents were unfamiliar with the approach that was taken. In fact, two-thirds had at least one involvement in the process, and over three-quarters thought that the process was an appropriate one. Only

16.3% felt that their own concerns had not been included in the final product. When asked how the process might have been improved, three-quarters of the faculty offered no suggestions; among the 22 who did, seven thought that the process should have begun at the departmental level rather than at the university-wide level, and five thought that the president should have listened more.

The vision statement included an environmental scan that discussed the following trends and their implications: population growth and demographic change; advancing technology; transformation to a global economy, electoral disquiet and taxpayer unrest, and cultural fragmentation. Among the respondents to the survey, there was little disagreement that these trends would affect the university. Further, only one person thought that the vision was not consonant with the trends.

Faculty were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought that the vision statement described a desirable future for Midlantic University. Only one respondent found the vision to be totally undesirable. Nearly three-quarters agreed that the depicted future was considerably desirable. The desirability of individual elements of the vision statement was not evenly perceived. For example, over 80% thought that the transformation to university into a learning community and the infusion of technology across the curriculum to be highly desirable. Less than half thought that it was highly desirable to increase the proportion of residential students, to add several doctoral programs, or to proceed on the assumption that increased tuition should fund the Midlantic vision. When asked to name the most desirable element of the vision, 26.7% cited

the transformation to a learning community. The perceptions of the total undesirability of individual elements was small, not exceeding 8.1% in any instance. When asked to name the least attractive element 11.6% cited the growth in enrollments to 12,000 students.

The faculty were a bit more skeptical regarding the extent to which the vision and its individual elements were realistic. Fewer than 5% thought the vision to be unrealistic, while the rest were equally divided between those who thought it to be highly realistic and those who thought it to be moderately realistic. The proportion of faculty perceiving individual elements to be highly realistic ranged from a low of 31.4% to a high of 60.5%. The proportion of faculty perceiving individual elements to be unrealistic ranged from a low of 3.5% to a high of 9.3%.

Several questions sought to determine the motivating capacity of the vision statement. Importantly, less than 6% thought that the vision statement did not reflect the values of the university community, while nearly half thought that the statement reflected Midlantic's values in a considerable fashion, and nearly two out of five thought that it moderately did so. Similarly, only two respondents indicated that they did not share the vision, while more than half shared it considerably, and nearly two out of five shared it moderately. Slightly lower proportions indicated that they were considerably (55.8%) or moderately (34.5%) motivated to participate in the vision's achievement; only 8.1% were not.

Table 2

Perceptions Regarding Content and Motivating Capacity

Item	Considerably	Moderately	Not at All	N/R
The vision is desirable	73.3%	23.3%	1.2%	2.3%
The vision is realistic	45.3%	45.3%	4.7%	4.7%
The vision reflects community values	47.7%	39.5%	5.8%	7.0%
I share the vision	57.0%	37.2%	2.3%	3.5%
I am motivated by the vision	55.8%	33.7%	8.1%	2.3%

We undertook a statistical analysis to determine the extent to which there were significant relationships between the demographic characteristics of the faculty, the process characteristics, the content of the vision statement, and the vision statement's motivating capacity (see Table 3). Among the demographic characteristics (school, rank, and years of service), only the number of years of service was associated with the extent to which the faculty member shared the vision and the extent to which the vision was motivating to the faculty member. Those whose service was greater than 25 years were the least supportive, while those who were with Midlantic for 10 years or less were the most supportive.

All three of the process characteristics had significant relationships. The number of involvements that the faculty member had in the development of the vision statement was positively associated with the extent to which the faculty member thought that the process was appropriate. Further, the extent to which they thought the process was appropriate was positively associated with the extent to which they shared the vision and the extent to which the vision was

motivating. Finally, the extent to which the process had accommodated their concerns was positively associated with the extent to which they shared the vision and the extent to which the vision was motivating to the faculty member.

Table 3

Associations between Pairs of Demographic, Process, Content and Motivating Variables

Characteristic	Chi-Square	Significance
Demographic with Content		
Years of service with Share vision	20.78176	.0227
Demographic with Motivating		
Years of service with Vision motivates	24.56756	.0062
Process with Process		
Involvements with Appropriateness	28.49273	.0047
Process with Content		
Appropriateness with Share vision	62.64069	.0000
Concerns reflected with Share vision	10.99350	.0266
Process with Motivating		
Appropriateness with Vision motivates	25.76462	.0003
Concerns reflected with Vision motivates	17.29920	.0017
Content with Content		
Describes desirable future with Describes realistic future	33.37488	.0000
Content with Motivating		
Describes desirable future with Vision motivates	42.17947	.0000
Share vision with Vision motivates	60.88335	.0000

Regarding content issues, the extent to which a faculty member believed that the vision

describes a desirable future was positively associated with the extent to which the faculty member believes the vision describes a realistic future and the extent to which the vision is motivating. Finally, there was a positive association between the extent to which the faculty member shares the vision and the extent to which the vision is motivating.

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was undertaken to determine which among the variables predicted whether a faculty member would find the vision to be motivating. As indicated in Table 4, the extent to which the faculty member shared the vision accounted for more than half of the variability regarding the vision's motivating ability. When the two other significant factors -- perceiving the vision to be desirable and perceiving the vision to be realistic -- were added, nearly two-thirds of the variability was accounted for.

Table 4
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis with the Extent to which the Vision is Motivating as the Dependent Variable

Step	Variable	r^2	F(Eqn)	Sig F
1	I share the vision	.5070	75.076	.000
2	The vision is desirable	.5871	51.190	.000
3	The vision is realistic	.6387	41.836	.000

Discussion

The process that Midlantic University used to develop its new vision statement was highly participative and resulted in broad support for the vision. This study indicates that faculty

participation in the developmental process is an important contributor to the vision's motivating capacity. We reach this conclusion in a deductive manner, since the number of involvements that faculty had in the development of the vision was associated only with how appropriate they thought the process to be and was not a significant factor in the stepwise multiple regression.

The regression analysis pointed to three factors as significant predictors of the vision's motivating ability: sharing the vision, finding it desirable, and finding it realistic. At least two, if not all three, of these factors seem to be related to an open visioning process; that is, the chances would be much greater of a vision statement positing a desirable future that the faculty would wish to share, if faculty helped to shape the vision. Could a president -- without including faculty in the visioning process -- conceivably develop a such a vision? Possibly, but not likely, given what we know about faculty and their desire for input regarding issues that affect them. Thus, a president would be wise to develop a process that permits such broad-based and meaningful participation that most faculty would conclude results in an appropriate process, even if they do not participate. For the process to be meaningful, it must be open to incorporating the concerns voiced by participating faculty, which in the aggregate are likely to be reflective of the concerns of the rest of the faculty.

The right process, then, can yield a desirable and realistic vision that draws broad supported and is highly motivating. In Midlantic's instance, seventeen meetings led to the development of the first draft of the vision statement. Feedback was solicited from the campus community regarding each of three successive drafts; most of the concerns of the 66 people who

offered their comments during this stage were incorporated into the final draft. This highly participative process led to a large proportion of faculty sharing the vision. As a result, only eight percent of the faculty said that they not motivated to help make the vision a reality. That places Midlantic in an advantageous position as it seeks to move forward with the rest of its planning process.

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